Poppies

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/40397607.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/F, Gen
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Alana Bloom/Abigail Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs & Hannibal Lecter
Character:	Abigail Hobbs
Additional Tags:	Unrequited Crush, POV Abigail Hobbs, Lesbian Abigail Hobbs, Violent Thoughts, Recreational Drug Use, Dancing, Father-Daughter Relationship, Canon Compliant, Teenage Rebellion
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Mundane Madness
Stats:	Published: 2022-07-18 Words: 4,883 Chapters: 1/1

Poppies

by det395

Summary

Abigail Hobbs grapples with her new life that's turning out to be just as blood-filled as her last and gains a sudden attachment to Alana Bloom that she doesn't particularly want to shake.

Notes

This fic takes place in some moments up to chapter 14 of Mundane Madness, but it still makes sense without reading that fic!

When Alana Bloom first walks into the room, Abigail feels her soul snag on reality.

Her heart picks up speed against her control. She doesn't have much control over things in her life, and it's clearly not going to start happening now. Not when Alana's eyes shine pale in the sunlight and her lips stretch easily and openly at Abigail. She's all contrasts, slicing at the edges and cutting into Abigail's life.

Abigail asks if she's a doctor, not realizing how dumb it is until it leaves her mouth. As if a doctor would show up wearing those pretty clothes.

She's not that kind of a doctor, but she does want to help Abigail.

Abigail squeezes her lips together and talks bitterly to offset the emotions creeping up into her throat. She looks at the hidden treasures placed on the floor, filled with clothes and music that Alana bought for her. She tries to focus on guessing what it might be as she learns about her family's demise and the men who 'saved' her.

When Alana puts a hand on her forearm, she gives in completely to the crutch that is the beauty and charm of Alana Bloom and hopes she can keep it for a while. Just this one thing.

At least her face doesn't give her away. That she's gotten that down to the T.

Her scar doesn't hurt that much, but it does itch horribly. She cringes when she remembers the sharp slice, the gurgling blood in her throat, and then the dizziness as it drained out of her.

She'd rather die by a blow, she thinks. Like a fall from a great height or a blunder from behind.

It isn't just that the pain wouldn't last so long. It would feel more satisfying. She wants her body to crack, her blood to splatter, her skull to break right in half. Thinking about being sliced open bit by bit makes her skin crawl.

But this is the path she got. Although she isn't actually dead, she reminds herself. She just has this scar and she can always get another one.

She covers up said scar with a scarf as she falls into step with Alana.

She admires the sagging begonias with their dark, wrinkling petals as summer crosses into fall. She memorizes Alana's face forefronting the vibrant red pockets of the courtyard. Her visits on Thursdays are the only thing that bring some semblance of contentment that she can vaguely recognize she had *before.*

The *before* is all tarnished. The *after* isn't off to a great start, so much so that she can't stop thinking about how satisfying that blow would be. All that sweet darkness it would bring.

Alana is waiting for Abigail to answer a question she's already forgotten.

"Are you close with *your* dad?" Abigail asks instead.

"We are casually acquainted. Calls every few months and visits on holidays. Mostly my mom just gives me the scoop."

"What are they like?" Abigail asks.

"They're both professors and probably borderline pathological in their curiosities." Abigail sees what looks to be an inside joke flit across her lips. "Very openly loving, though. I'm lucky."

"You get it from them?"

Alana hesitates for only a moment then smiles bashfully. “The curiosity? I suppose so.”

Alana is dressed modestly, a scarf to mirror Abigail’s own. It matches the red autumn leaves of the courtyard and brings out the flush in her cheeks.

Abigail only wears the clothes that Alana bought her. They are different from her old wardrobe and it is a relief to look and feel like a different person, especially if that person is someone connected to Alana Bloom. She’s growing greedy, though. While once the clothes were enough to satisfy her, she now waits for their Thursday appointments with steadily growing restlessness. If she’s being honest, there’s little else that makes her *feel* anymore. Feel *good* things, at least. She has no shortage of anxiety or rage. She supposes that’s not so different from the *before* when her relationship with her dad was growing increasingly tumultuous.

“Do you study serial killers? Like, specifically?” Abigail asks. Again, Alana hesitates. Abigail likes knowing that she can surprise her.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“My own curiosity.”

“About what makes a person go so wrong?”

“Something like that.”

Abigail almost wants to share her own story, Nicholas Boyle and all. Alana would know if she was a psychopath or not.

“Well, have you figured it out?” Abigail asks.

“I wouldn’t be here if I did.”

“You’ll tell me if you do?”

Alana places a hand on her arm. “You’ll be the first to know.”

She isn’t aware of how obvious her regard for Alana is until one day Alana steps back.

Was Abigail leaning too far forward? She basically has a tally of all the times that Alana has touched her in impersonal but affectionate caresses to her arms, back, hair. It’s not excessive.

“Is this what I have to expect for the rest of my life, a myriad of social workers that come and go?” Abigail asks. She crosses her arms over her chest so she doesn’t reach out. Clearly, Alana doesn’t want that.

Alana is planning to visit less frequently, only biweekly now, or when needed. *Half* of what little time they have already.

“You can expect to create stable relationships with many people in your life outside of social work.” Alana smiles. It’s always a lovely smile.

“Are you and me still going to have a stable relationship?”

“You can always reach out to me if you need to,” Alana says.

“But you’re not going to visit me?”

“I’ll still visit.”

“You don’t have to. I know you’re busy,” Abigail says. She looks at the sun over Alana’s shoulder until her eyes grow watery.

“I will always have time for you,” Alana says. She leans in slightly as she says it and Abigail breathes in her perfume. It’s sweet. She rocks on the balls of her feet.

“We will transition slowly, I am still your caretaker for the time being, and it is up to us to negotiate when it actually ends. In the meantime, we can branch out from our usual conversation. We can have dinner with Will Graham and Dr. Lecter and you can get to know them better. We can find other activities for you to do. There’s some great horseback riding lessons near Baltimore, or we can choose something else that you want to try. Anything.”

“Father-daughter bonding?” Abigail mutters bitterly.

“Are you uncomfortable with their guardianship, Abigail?”

With the man who killed my father and the man who made my father almost kill me? Those *guardians?*

She just shakes her head. “Do you ride horses, Dr. Bloom?”

“Not for a long time. When I was a child I enjoyed it at camp. I used to pretend I was a rogue cowgirl hunting criminals. I still think it’s a beautiful activity, very peaceful.”

Abigail softens slightly. “That could be nice.”

“You deserve some nice things in your life.”

“It will take a lot of nice things to offset the support group meetings here.”

“I know. But it’s important to have that place to talk about your trauma.”

“So, I’m still traumatized enough to need a support group, but not traumatized enough to need you anymore?” Abigail asks.

Alana sighs. “I’m sorry, Abigail, I really am.”

You would stay with me if you were sorry enough, she thinks.

“It’s important that you talk about how my leaving makes you feel, but I don’t believe I’m the appropriate person to have that conversation. Hard to stay objective when we’re talking about me, and I don’t want you to hide away from any negative emotions. Would you be open to talking to Dr. Lecter about it?” Alana asks.

Abigail hesitates. It is admittedly difficult to lie to Dr. Lecter.

“It’s fine,” she says. She starts walking again and Alana follows in step.

Hannibal is a better cook than her dad. The meat looks and tastes like beef and could fool just about anyone, but Abigail would know that texture anywhere.

She watches Alana chew with resigned fascination. Her lips are red and her blouse is buttoned up nearly all the way. Now they have both been fed what they never wanted to eat.

Dr. Lecter is talking about the evolution of horse riding, his voice a calm thrum in the room to give the impression that it isn't an awkward dinner. Will was feeling too 'under the weather' in his recovery from something to come to this one, but Abigail is relieved. She spent most of their last breakfast get-together watching the sweat race down his forehead and into his blank eyes.

Abigail lifts up her wine glass to drink but finds that the single glass she was allowed is already gone.

She wants to fantasize about Alana while the smell of her perfume is so close by, about how things would be if Alana weren't trying so hard to push her away, but she's stuck here pretending like she doesn't feel like screaming.

Hannibal designates her as his assistant in preparing their tiramisu, saving her from the torturous dinner for a few minutes. She follows him to the kitchen and he teaches her how to shave chocolate into tiny curls.

"You are in a mood, Abigail. Would you like to talk about Alana?" Hannibal asks.

"Did she put you up to it?"

"No."

"I thought she would. She wanted me to talk to you about it."

"Why do you think that is?"

"She wants me to feel more connected to you and Will."

“Mm.”

“And not be so attached to her.”

“Do you feel attached to Dr. Bloom?” Hannibal asks.

“I feel like I did something *wrong*.” She shaves the chocolate slightly too fast and it falls on the cake in little flakes. She finishes the third piece and then Hannibal gives her some sugar to dust on top.

“I promise, you haven’t done anything wrong.”

“I’m getting punished anyway.”

“She thinks she’s doing what’s best for you.”

“Do you think she is?”

“Sometimes my patients want to be my friend. They can no longer prioritize their own needs because they are too busy shaping themselves in such a way to please me instead. I am then obligated to refer them to a new psychiatrist, as much as it pains me. There is an unequal power dynamic between a patient, who has come to me to share their vulnerabilities, and I, who knows their entire medical history and has dedicated my time to analyzing them.”

“What about after you’ve referred them? Can they be your friend then?”

“It is frowned upon.”

Abigail gives him a look. He starts to place berries carefully on top of the cakes.

“Isn’t Will your patient *and* friend?”

He just gives her a small smile but doesn’t reply. “Scoop some melted chocolate into that piping bag. You can make your choice of design on the plates.”

Alana cancels one of their appointments and Abigail leaves that same night.

She’s been better at not running away, all things considered, mostly because it’s too damn cold to leave every night. Thankfully today she’s found a warm spot by the paying kiosks at the subway station. She stays until she’s almost falling asleep and then boards the train.

She could barely stand the plainness of her room tonight. At least climbing over the wall at the east wing gives her some semblance of freedom and gets her heart racing for a few minutes; the best reminder she has that she’s alive.

The worst thing about Port Haven is the boredom. Mind-numbing, infuriating boredom.

Her cellphone dies on the way to Hannibal’s house and she jumps on the spot to warm up outside of his front door. She tries the handle and checks all of the hiding places she can think of. He’s always kept the doors unlocked but tonight even his car is nowhere to be found.

She circles the house and sits on some patio furniture but her teeth are chattering and her toes are numb and she needs to get inside.

She finally finds a window near the ground leading into the basement. She grips it with her warm palms even though the glass is so cold it stings. She gets it open enough that she’ll just barely fit through the panel. She pushes through on her stomach, legs first and wiggles her hips through the space, scraping along the windowsill.

Hanging down backward, she's still too high up to reach the ground. She grips as tight as she can as she shimmies back, but her hands are so cold that it hurts. She feels her grip let up more and more until she's falling back and clattering to the floor.

She goes still and clenches her teeth so that she doesn't cry out in pain, listening for any movement just in case Hannibal is home. After a few moments, she clambers up to her feet.

First she needs light. She feels around the wall, wincing at each creak, and finds a plastic switch.

She freezes when she gets a look at the basement. It doesn't quite click in her head, all of the chains hanging down and the glass casing around what looks like an operating table. Empty, thankfully.

She walks through and opens the cabinet doors one by one. Medicine, tools, all so utterly suspicious in a place like this.

She remembers recognizing the taste of dinner last night. It shouldn't be surprising. It's strangely fascinating, actually. She doesn't know what that says about her.

Another cabinet is filled with medicine. She scans the shelves, reading packets with names she can't even begin to pronounce until she finds one she recognizes. Oxycontin. Oxy? She looks behind her one last time, opens the packet, and shoves a pill into her pocket.

She looks through the rest of the instruments. Some she can hardly imagine being used in a clinical setting and she has to come to terms with the fact that these blades and scalpels and… buzz saws..? are for much more malicious intentions.

Cannibalism. What is it? Is there a hunger for it they cannot stave off? Is it inside her, too? Is it genetic? Environmental? She enjoyed dinner last night; perhaps she's developed a taste for it. Alana seemed to enjoy it too.

One corner of the room breaks off into what looks to be a cellar, with shelves of boxes and cans and a deep freeze in the corner. She knows she doesn't want to look in *there.* There are also some bottles of wine. That's safer. She grabs one that has a twist top and immediately opens it to sip, wincing at the bitter taste.

Quickly she steps out of the little room. She heads back up the stairs but stops when the door handle to the main floor doesn't budge. She wiggles it around with all her strength and examines the door but there's no getting around it: the door clearly locks from the outside.

Groaning, she storms back down the stairs and closes the window to the outside. There's no way she can crawl back out there now and she doesn't want to freeze to death anyway.

She swallows back the pill from her pocket with the wine and lays down on top of the operating table with the bottle clutched close and accessible, all the while considering the great irony that she's definitely going to sleep in Dr. Lecter's serial killer lair. It's not the first time she's slept peacefully in the presence of one.

She ran through the dark streets with Cassie after the first party they had ever been to. It wasn't quite like the highschool parties she saw in movies but she was elated anyway, tipsy on stolen vodka in a water bottle and A&W root beer as chaser.

They sprinted under streetlights catching snowflakes in their hair until Cassie slipped and slid across the slush. Abigail let herself fall right after, right next to her in the dark spot of the where the street light didn't quite reach.

That's the only time she can remember feeling as good as she does right now.

Her emotions usually come full-shot or not at all but right now she just feels beautiful, happy emptiness.

Her motivation to roll off the operating table comes from a few feet away, more pills calling out for her. She walks—stumbles—over there and swallows down two more pills and shoves another handful in her pocket with the burn of satisfaction in her chest. Almost half of the wine bottle is gone and it goes down easier with every sip.

She does another lap around the basement. It's not so scary anymore. In fact, she doesn't feel much of anything at all about it. She does wish it was warmer.

She tries fruitlessly to turn on her phone again. All she'd like is some music or maybe a nice video to play to fill the silence. She'd sing if she could.

Or have someone here with her. *Alana* here with her. But not Alana how she is, responsible and pure and professional. She'd have Alana share in her depravity, poisoned by the meat at their table and giving up all that sparkling good that clouds her. Then they might meet up where there's no boundaries to separate them, not age or ethics or morals, just a woman to take care of her how she needs. A woman's body before her like she's never had before, except for the times that her dad guided her hand from white sternum, between perk breasts and down smooth stomach toward shaved pelvis. She wasn't used to seeing other naked bodies. They looked like her but also *didn't*, and then she opened them up where they were still warm and wondered if her organs were as slick and plump.

It's then that she hears movement upstairs, gentle creaking but careless steps. She checks her phone before she remembers that it's still dead, but she can see through the window that it's still pitch-black outside.

She heads up the stairs and knocks on the door. She waits for only a moment and then pounds as hard as she can until the door finally swings open to reveal Hannibal on the other end. He's wearing an entirely clear plastic suit over his typical wear and stares at her in confusion.

"You smell like fish," she blurts out.

"I picked up dinner," he explains quietly.

She doesn't like the sound of that. She looks past him to check if anyone else—dead or alive—is here, but she doesn't see anyone.

At the end of a hiccup she asks, "Do you have an iPhone charger?" She holds up her cellphone.

Hannibal stares at her blankly before backing away. "Perhaps. Let me look for it."

Shaking her head, she walks the other direction and heads up the stairs to the top floor. She swerves around a coat of armour and stares at the paintings in passing until she finds the largest bedroom. She finds a walk-in closet at the back and begins going through Hannibal's drawers. After enough searching, she finds a soft sweatshirt and pajama pants with a drawstring that she can roll up a few times above her ankles. She finds some socks and pulls them nearly all the way up her calves.

She steps out into the bedroom where Hannibal is waiting and takes the iPhone cord. He's no longer in the strange outfit he had on before.

"What was it?" he asks.

"What was what?"

"Abigail," he says, scolding. "What did you take?"

"Oxycotton." She smiles.

"Oxy*contin*."

He *tsk*'s, then grabs her face to peer into her eyes. His thumb feels kind of nice against her cheek. "How many?"

“One,” she lies.

“Abigail.”

“One a few hours earlier, and two more recently.”

His eyes don’t even twitch, but his face tilts ever so slightly as he observes her. She’s worried he might make her vomit them up, but then he straightens up.

“Come along.”

“Are you mad at me?” she asks to his back as she follows.

“No,” he says.

“Disappointed?” she asks, sarcastically.

“No.”

“Then what?”

“Understanding.”

“Will you give me a prescription then?”

“No.”

“Only the drugs you think will help with my trauma then?”

“You took an opioid. I do not doubt that you are in severe pain, but it will not aid in your healing, only your escapism.”

They arrive in the kitchen and he fills a water glass for her and waits for her to take it.

“I would much prefer you call me when you’re feeling this kind of way. And to come through the front door.”

She sips. “Well in my defense I didn’t know your basement was a torture chamber.”

Hannibal stares at her and she stares back. One beat, two, three, and her eye starts twitching, and then he turns around and grabs a tea towel.

“Does any food sound at all appealing?”

“No.”

“We’ll try some yogurt,” he says.

She plugs in her phone while he dishes out some yogurt, topping it with fruit and granola until it looks as fancy as anything else he makes. She presses the cold bowl to her cheek instead of eating it and revels in the smooth coolness.

“What was with the weird outfit?” she asks.

“It protects my clothes underneath.”

“Fine, just don’t tell me the truth of anything! It’s not like everything here and everything you do isn’t fucking *insane*.”

“Watch your language, Abigail. Need I remind you that you’re the one who showed up unannounced in my basement?”

She glares at him as she eats a bite of yogurt. It’s unappetizing and she pushes it away.

“What do you think Will would do if I told him?” she asks challengingly.

He looks more exasperated than she’s ever seen him before. “I don’t know, what do you think?”

“Well how many times did he shoot my dad?”

The air around her seems to change. She does her best to avoid Hannibal’s eye contact, but she can *feel* it. She knows she should be scared even if everything feels a little far away and surreal.

“Do you believe you would get a chance to tell him?” Hannibal asks and the words flow around Abigail like slithering snakes.

Abigail looks down at the table and shakes her head timidly. At least she still has an ounce of self-preservation and the wherewithal to look scared and innocent when she needs to. She peeks her eyes up to see Hannibal’s expression and he sighs.

“What can I do for you tonight, Abigail?” he asks, clearly offering a truce.

She shrugs. “It’d be nice to listen to music.”

“You can do that.”

She glances over at her phone. “Do you own a radio or are you one of those people who will only listen to music out of, like, an antique tape recorder from 1852?”

“Those pills have loosened up your tongue far too much.”

She looks up, grateful that there’s at least a hint of amusement on his face.

He takes her hand and helps her stand and then leads her to the living room. It turns out he has not only a radio, but an AUX cord.

She clicks her way through the many buttons with some trial and error and jarring static noises and then brings over her phone to charge where the AUX cord can reach.

The first song that comes on shuffle isn’t even one she particularly likes that much, but it’s like she’s hearing it for the first time. The vibrations through the speakers raise the hair on her arms, seeping down into her bones. She sits on the floor and leans her head against a speaker and the air from it blows her hair against her neck. She sways back and forth, rolling her head side to side on the metal rim. This warmth rushing through her feels familiar and she’s certain her redose has kicked in fully.

Hannibal returns to the living room with a clear mug of espresso that he sips and then sets on the coffee table before offering a hand to Abigail. She stares at it.

“Music is best played or danced to,” he says. “An active participant in song hears what others don’t.”

“I don’t really know how to dance,” she says, taking his hand and letting him help her up. His strength is clear in how solid his grip is, lifting her weight easily.

“It is an increasingly scarce but invaluable skill to learn traditional dances.” He looks softer now, smiling like he’s truly excited about the prospect.

“That’s not really…” she starts.

He raises his eyebrows and looks kind enough that she continues.

“Traditional isn’t really what my generation dances. I don’t know that it will really come in handy.”

“It is nonetheless a good way to learn rhythm and the art of partnership in dance. It will help you if you move onto other kinds of dance, I assure you. Humor me with a simple waltz. May I change the music to something more appropriate?” he asks.

She giggles at the thought of waltzing to the pop music currently playing. She shakes her head.

“This should be a challenge to you as well.”

He breathes in and out of his nose but nods and takes her hands, placing one on his shoulder and holding the other.

“Follow my steps. We will start out slow with me leading.”

Her world seems to spin even as they turn in slow steps. She stares down at their legs, trying her best not to step on Hannibal’s much more graceful feet as he gradually leads her faster and faster. Her socks are falling down her legs and the pajama pants skim the floor. She grows breathless with the concentration and realizes she has been holding her breath.

“Breathe, this should not be a constant effort once you start to find the natural rhythm. It first takes practice to learn a dance and then it leads to an irreplaceable presentness, this permissiveness of some senses to override all others. Chin up, Abigail.”

She forces her eyes up, almost certain her legs will get tangled up now, but against all odds they just keep spinning through the living room.

“See, you are a faster learner. There is much more I’d like to teach you and now is the ideal time as we are on the precipice of your life upending and starting anew.”

“You think so? Like I might be able to leave Port Haven soon?”

He leans in slightly and whispers to her. “I promise that you will. Your life will truly begin. I understand that you are nervous about attending university in the states but you are not confined to this country where your face has headlined the press. If I were to choose for you, I would put you into the University of Florence.”

“Italy?” she asks, incredulous.

“There is so much I could teach you there. Keep this between us for now, though. One day Will and I will take care of you.”

Her smile drops slightly. No Alana in the pictures, and she imagines that would persist.

“We wouldn’t be leaving in a legal way, would we?” she asks.

He just gives her a small smile. Chills break out on the back of her neck. He could want to kill her in the end, just like her dad, and here she is in his arms.

She considers something else.

“Will wants to go too?” she asks.

He stiffens slightly in her grip, turning his head to watch where they step. “He will,” he says simply.

This all must be a fantasy, nice hopes and dreams to sate her, nothing that will ever actually happen. But for the first time that she can recall, she sympathizes with Hannibal. She thinks he really wants this.

“I’m not the only one with a crush,” she teases.

He spins her around a bit harder and then dips her back so suddenly that she gasps, caught over his arm and too weak to lift her head for a lingering moment before he pulls her up. Her head spins.

“Yeah,” she says nervously, falling back into step with him. “A new life sounds like exactly what I need.”

He doesn’t speak again and she loses track of time waltzing around the room and letting Hannibal twirl and dip her, returning to the lightness of before, even if it’s all a happy-go-lucky father-daughter act. She doesn’t know what Hannibal intends to teach her or what the future holds, and it feels almost inevitable that her life will continue to be a series of new terrors, springing up like poppies in a cemetery. But for now the night is quiet and her chest hums with artificial contentedness and it’s hard in her lost inhibitions to deny the appeal of someone so strong promising to take good care of her again. And maybe this time he’ll decide he likes her alive and growing and learning and won’t slice her neck right back open again.

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